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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 003124

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PINR KDEM RS

SUBJECT: WAGERS ON WHO WILL BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF
DAGESTAN, ANYONE?

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Susan Elliott for reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The term of Dagestan's current president, Mukhu Aliyev, expires in February 2010. Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev has not shown any haste in either naming a successor or appointing Aliyev to a new term, although he should have made the decision by now. Most money is now on the dark horse candidacy of a classmate of Medvedev's, and his decision not only as to who will head Dagestan, but also as to who will serve as his proposed overseer for the North Caucasus will be telling for not only Russia's most troubled region, but also for his place within the ruling tandem. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev has until February 2010 to decide his choice to be president of Dagestan. Medvedev has reportedly had a list of five names, including incumbent president Mukhu Aliyev, from which to chose since November 16. Also on this short list are Deputy Prime Minister Magomed Abdullayev, Federation Council Advisor Magomed Magomedov, Dagestan National Assembly member and the son of Dagestan's first president Magomedsalam Magomedov, and the head of Dagestan's treasury department Saygidguseyn Magomedov.

¶3. (C) Magomed Abdullayev appears to have the inside track, according to commentators and our contacts in Moscow. While early money was on the re-appointment of Mukhu Aliyev, in the last several months there has been a low-intensity smear campaign against him in the media. In early November Gadzhi Makhachev, Dagestan's Permanent Representative in Moscow, told us that Aliyev would be returned to office because "no one else in Dagestan would follow the Kremlin's orders as fully as he." At a November 13 reception at Spaso House, Makhachev gave us an un-attributed 12-page report setting out Aliyev's failings over the past four years as president. Central among these are the republic's continued social, economic and security problems. (Note: Makhachev would not tell us who drafted the anti-Aliyev manifesto, but enough of these same arguments against him have appeared in the media to lead us to believe there was a concerted effort to discredit Aliyev. End Note).

¶4. (SBU) Aliyev himself felt the need to counter negative reports about him in the influential Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Izvestiya and Rossiskaya Gazeta by giving an interview in early December to the local state-controlled Dagestan news agency. In November the Federal State Statistics Services for Dagestan issued the results of a poll stating that over half (54 percent) of the 600 respondents thought Aliyev was doing a good job. In response, the head of Ekho-Moskviy's affiliate in Makhachkala said that no more than 30 percent of respondents could have been satisfied with Aliyev's activities as president over the past four years.

¶ 15. (C) On December 17 Makhachev told us that Abdullayev would get the nod, despite that fact that he had little (less than one month) experience as Deputy Prime Minister. He said that Abdullayev, an ethnic Avar (the divers republic's largest ethnic group), was an outsider from St. Petersburg, who had not spent much time in Dagestan and -- for better or worse -- was not involved in the inter-clan and inter-ethnic rivalries that exist there. Chief Editor of the Caucasian Knot internet news portal Grigoriy Shvedov confirmed to us December 23 that he too believed Medvedev would name Abdullayev, but claimed the reasons for this decision were personal. According to Shvedov, Medvedev and Abdullayev were classmates together on the law faculty in St. Petersburg and their wives are friends.

¶ 16. (SBU) Novaya Gazeta's outspoken columnist Yuliya Latynina has recently joined the side of those who feel Aliyev will not be given a second term. In a December 23 article, she wrote that unlike Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of neighboring Chechnya, Aliyev did not have the money or guns to address Dagestan's problems. Another strike against him, according to Latynina, was his quarrel with Moscow-based Dagestani businessman Suleyman Kerimov. Latynina concluded that, which ever of the five candidates Medvedev selects, Dagestan's next president will have to deal with the three biggest problems facing the republic -- a wahhabist insurgency, corrupt bureaucrats who are a power unto themselves and the overreaching influence of the Chechen president, who, according to her, can call Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin at any time.

Comment

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¶ 17. (C) Naming Abdullayev would be in line with Medvedev's two previous appointments in Russia's troubled North Caucasus region. He chose Boris Ebzeyev, a sitting Russian Constitutional Court judge, to be president of Karachay-Cherkessk and then Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, a Interior Ministry general, to be president of Ingushetiya. Both have performed well, although neither has solved the ethnic tension in Karachay-Cherkessk, the roiling insurgency in Ingushetiya and the corruption endemic to both. In addition to appointment of Dagestan's next president, Medvedev has also been quite deliberate in naming the overseer for the entire North Caucasus proposed in his November speech before the Federal Assembly. Our contacts have said that this individual too will probably come from outside the region and will not be a member of any ethnic group there. This delay could be the result of the need to come to agreement within the tandem over such an important position.
Rubin